**Affecting Change: A Mini Unit on Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement**

**Kate Jones—Seoul International School**

*Background*

I teach at an international school in Seoul, South Korea and while we have an American curriculum and many of my students have lived at least part of their lives in the US or Canada, the Civil Rights Movement and the idea of civil disobedience are relatively unfamiliar concepts to many of my students. My goal with this mini-unit is to introduce my students to Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” and the Civil Rights Movement, and to have them try to affect change in their own world. At my school, I have 80 minute blocks and see my students every other day. Students take both US Literature and US History in 10th grade at my school and next year I’ll be teaching sections of both. I feel confident that I will be able to convince the other teachers to participate in this mini-unit with me so that all 10th graders at SIS will have this experience.

*Overview of Unit*

Step 1: Students will be introduced to the concept of civil disobedience and non-violent protest. They will then read an excerpt from Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” in the US Literature textbook. After a class discussion and questions, they will work on their own or with a partner to create a t-shirt design and/or slogan that addresses the main themes and ideas from the piece. 1 class period.

Step 2: Students will have an overview of the Civil Rights Movement and the key events and figures. This will include watching a video of some type, reading the chapter from their US History textbook and primary resources, and participating in a “dinner party” activity to give them background information (I will use Erica Irlbeck’s lesson plan for this section of my unit). 3 class periods, and homework.

Step 3: Students will pick an issue (international, national, local, school) that they are dissatisfied with and will determine how they want that issue to change. They will then write a business letter to be mailed to a person with the authority to impact that issue (i.e. the school principal, their congressperson, etc). 2 class periods, and homework.

*Breakdown of Lessons*

Step 1: Reading “Civil Disobedience” and creating a t-shirt

1. Students will read the excerpt from “Civil Disobedience” in their US Lit textbook in English class. We will read it as a group because the language can be quite difficult and the concepts can be new for the students. This will then segue into a whole class discussion on what civil disobedience is and examples in history where it has been used successfully.
2. Students will then work on their own or with a partner to design a t-shirt that addresses the main theme(s) and/or idea(s) from the text. (The reading questions and t-shirt handout and directions are on page 3.) They will share their t-shirts with the class and explain their design and slogan and then their t-shirts will be posted around the classroom for students’ reflection during the unit.

Step 2: Civil Rights Movement Introduction

1. In US History class, students will watch a video giving an overview of the Movement (possibly from “The Century” series, “Eyes on the Prize”, or another video).
2. For homework, they will read the chapter on the Movement in their US History textbook and complete a reading guide (the reading guide is on page 4 and corresponds to the *Americans: Reconstruction to the 21st Century* textbook [Danzer, et al, McDougall Littlel]).
3. During the next US Lit class, they will read, analyze, and discuss some primary sources highlighting the non-violence of the Movement and some of the issues that brought about the Movement. This could include Jim Crow laws, King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, a voting literacy test, photos from the Movement, etc.
4. During the next US History class, they will participate in a “dinner party” assignment, modeled off of Erica Irlbeck’s lesson (Thanks Erica! ☺). For this assignment, I will have prepared small summaries of the roles in the Movement of 5-10 key figures, such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr, Fred Shuttlesworth, JoAnne Robinson, Calvin Woods, Claudette Colvin, etc. Students will be subdivided into small groups so that there will be 1 person playing each role in a group. During the “dinner party”, the students will teach each other about their persona by engaging in first person conversations with everyone else in their group. Ideally I would be able to morph this into a web activity by writing summaries that highlight the connections between the Movement members.

Step 3: Letter Writing

1. For an anticipatory set, I will ask students to brainstorm things that occur internationally, nationally, locally, in the school, or somewhere else that they want to see change. The students will then narrow their brainstorm down to one issue.
2. I will then share with the students that they are going to take some of the principles from “Civil Disobedience” and the Movement to try to affect change on this issue by writing a letter to some sort of official.
3. Students will determine what issue they are going to write about and who they are going to write the letter to. They will suggest a solution to the problem and will also include what they themselves can do to try to improve the issue. (The directions and scoring guide for the letter are on pages 4 and 5). In the next US Literature class, they will begin the rough draft in class and finish it for homework. We may also do some peer editing in class of the letter.
4. They will turn in 2 copies of a final draft of this letter, one in a stamped envelope which I will mail, and one that I will grade.

**Handouts, Directions, etc.**

|  |
| --- |
| Step 1Questions from Civil Disobedience  1. What would be Thoreau’s perfect government? In your view, it is possible? Explain. 2. What does Thoreau mean when he says, “Government is at best an expedient”? 3. What problems does Thoreau have with a government of majority rule? 4. What does Thoreau say about people who have “an unhealthy respect for the law”? 5. What does Thoreau say we should do about unjust laws? 6. What does Thoreau say the government will do to you if you don’t obey it? How does he suggest you “reply” to the government? 7. What does Thoreau say about the relationship of the individual to the State? 8. What do you see as some positives and negatives of what Thoreau was writing about? |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Step 1  **“Civil Disobedience” T-shirt Design Assignment**  **Due \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  Step 1: Design a t-shirt that addresses the main theme(s) and/or message(s) from Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience”.   * Your message about civil disobedience needs to fit on a t-shirt, so brevity is key. Make your message short and to the point. Word choice is very important. * Your design may include words and/or visuals. * Your t-shirt may not include the words “civil disobedience” (that would make it too easy!). How will you get the message across without using those terms? * You may do this assignment with a partner or individually. No more than 2 people may work together.   Step 2: Now that you’ve designed your t-shirt, who would wear it?   * Give an example of a person (real or fictional, dead or alive) who might actually wear your t-shirt because they believed in the message. * Your person may not be Henry David Thoreau (again, that would be too easy!). * On your own paper (1 sheet per partnership), write an explanation for your t-shirt design and who would wear your shirt and why.   Scoring Guide   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Criteria** | **Points Possible** | **Points Received** | | T-shirt:   * Design of t-shirt shows understanding of the major concepts from “Self-Reliance.” * Design makes sense to the viewer. * Design is creative and carefully done | \_\_\_\_\_/3  \_\_\_\_\_/3  \_\_\_\_\_/3 |  | | Written portion:   * A person has been chosen who could conceivably wear the t-shirt. * Explanation of t-shirt design and possible wearer is complete and shows understanding of the major concepts from “Self Reliance.” | \_\_\_\_/1  \_\_\_\_/10 |  | | TOTAL | \_\_\_\_/20 points |  | |

|  |
| --- |
| Step 2Chapter 21: Civil Rights Reading Guide *40 points* Describe Jim Crow laws. (1)  1. Describe the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Include a discussion of “Separate but equal” in your answer. (2) 2. What was the reaction to desegregation, as exemplified at Little Rock Central High School in 1957? (1) 3. Describe the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Include Rosa Parks and Walking for Justice in your discussion. (2) 4. What is “soul force”? Whose idea was it? (2) 5. Describe the sit-ins of 1960. Where did they take place, who participated, and what were they trying to accomplish? (4) 6. Who were the freedom riders and what were they trying to accomplish? (2) 7. At what event did King give his “I have a dream” speech? (1) 8. Who was Robert Moses and what did he try to do during the Freedom Summer of 1964? (2) 9. What was the Selma Campaign and how did it lead to the Voting Rights Act of 1965? (2) 10. Who was Malcolm X? What were his beliefs? What was his connection with the Nation of Islam? How does the phrase “ballots or bullets” relate to him? (4) 11. What is “Black Power”? (1) 12. Who were the Black Panthers? What were their major beliefs? Who were they more similar to, King or Malcolm X? Why? (4) 13. When, where, and how did King die? (3) 14. Name and describe 2 gains made by the civil rights movement. (4) 15. Name and describe 2 areas in which the civil rights movement left unfinished work. (4) 16. What is affirmative action? (1) |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Step 3  **Civic Responsibility Letter**  Step 1  Is there something happening in Mukilteo that really bugs you? Something happening in Washington that chaps your hide? Something happening all around the US that frosts your cookies? **Choose 1 issue on the local, statewide, or national level that you want to change.**  Step 2  **Choose 1 or more public officials to write to about this issue**. Choose a person or people who have the ability to change your issue. In order to do so, search online to find the names of the people who hold the following positions:  1) Mayor of Mukilteo \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  2) Mayor of Everett \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  3) Snohomish County Sheriff \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  4) Snohomish County Executive \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  5) King County Executive \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  6) King County Sheriff \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  7) Washington State Governor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  8) Washington State Senators (2) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  9) 1st Congressional District Representative \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  10) President \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  The person you write to may be one of these people or they may be someone else.  Step 3  **Write a business letter to a public official about the issue you’ve chosen.** Your letter must include the following:   * It must be in business letter format * It must explain what the issue you’d like to change is in a 1-sentence thesis statement. * It must explain why you want the issue to change and what you could do to help it change. * It must explain how you want the issue to change. * It must explain what role the public official may have in helping to change this issue. * It must not have *any* conventions errors.   Step 4  **Print out and turn in 2 copies of your letter**.  Step 5  **Send a copy of your letter to the person you’ve written to**. In order to do this, you must turn in a business sized envelope with a 39-cent stamp on it. I will mail your letter for you.  Step 6  **Turn in a copy of your letter to Ms. Jones for grading**.  Scoring Guide   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Nuts & Bolts | \* Letter is typed in a normal font.  \* Letter is in proper business-letter format | \_\_\_\_/10 points | | Conventions | \* Letter has no spelling errors  \* Letter has no punctuation errors  \* Letter has no other conventions errors | \_\_\_\_/10 points | | Body of letter | \* Explains what the issue you’d like to change is.  \* Explains why you want the issue to change.  \* Explains how you want the issue to change.  \* Explains what role the public official may have in helping to change this issue. | \_\_\_\_/25 points | | Envelope | \* You have turned in a stamped, addressed envelope with 1 copy of your letter | \_\_\_\_/5 points | | Total |  | \_\_\_\_/50 points |   Good Letter Format  Please use this format to ensure that you include everything in your letter you need to.  **Paragraph One: Introduction and thesis statement**  **Paragraph Two: Facts supporting thesis and commentary**  **Paragraph Three: What *you* can do about the issue**  **Paragraph Four: Solution for the representative and what they can do about the issue**  **Paragraph Five: Conclusion and thanks**  Letter Don’ts   * Don’t handwrite your letter—typing it makes it look more professional. * Don’t make your letter over 1-page long. Change the margins or make the font smaller if you need to in order to keep 1-page in length. * Don’t mention you’re doing this for a school project—you are a concerned citizen and that’s why you’re writing the letter. * Don’t have *any* spelling or conventions errors—it’s hard to take someone seriously if they can’t spell or write a proper sentence. |